

REVIEWS



Gelatin, "Habitat Tour 2001."
Performance view.

GELATIN

LEO KOENIG INC.

The Austrian collective Gelatin was supposed to open its New York show on September 11. About two weeks later, after some hesitation over whether to proceed, it launched "Habitat Tour 2001" with the first of three Thursday evening lectures-cum-performances that accompa-

nied a room-size installation. This "habitat" was outfitted with a large work table and four bunk beds; the walls were covered with images of the Gelatin boys naked, album covers, cartoons lampooning Julian Schnabel, a picture of Michael Jackson, and clips from pornographic magazines collaged, Berlin Dada style, with other images, heads placed on different bodies, bodies situated in shockingly funny ways. Real adolescent art-world fun, complete with groupings of dilapidated toys and stuffed animals that had been altered by amputation or naughty addition (elephant trunk for penis, etc.).

During the show's run, the installation grew with the addition of relics from the lectures, elaborate, often hilarious and messy performances in which the artists recounted previous projects and spun tales of adventures in different countries, providing as well their own takes on natural and scientific phenomena: A volcanic eruption was likened to a trip down an elevator shaft; an autopsy was demonstrated by disemboweling a large teddy bear. It was sometimes difficult to tell what was planned and what was improvised or simply fabricated, and the lectures were seamless but also ad hoc—you didn't know, and neither did the artists, exactly where the ketchup would spatter when the bottle exploded after having air pumped in. As a means of illustrating key concepts, large two-dimensional works were executed during the lectures: drip paintings, crude drawings in colored markers, cartoonish diagrams of the installations. The subject of one performance was Hawaii, which sounded like a perfect escape from the grim reality of ground zero, just a few blocks south of the gallery. Gelatin's four

members made their entrance by riding a surfboard down a wooden ramp to the ecstatic applause of the audience. Thematic costumes completed the scene: a grass skirt paired with a coconut-shell bikini top, shirts with tropical motifs, and a pair of revealing little shorts constructed out of a plastic leopard-printed shopping bag. Modesty was not a concern—indeed, the artists often appear naked, or nearly so, in photographs and performances. The audience may have blushed and giggled when genitals were allowed to hang out (this abandon seemed to increase with each performance), but the exposed anatomy would just be casually tucked back in and the proceedings continue.

Liberating though this unself-consciousness may have been, the true appeal of attending the lectures was the venue-within-a-venue: a mini arena constructed from doors and pieces of scrap wood. Borderline legal, the low structure was small enough to fit into the gallery but ingeniously constructed to accommodate several dozen people on three seating levels as well as the artists and all their props. Climbing into the creaky amphitheater felt dangerous, but there was also an odd sense of comfort and safety once you were settled inside, like being in a dollhouse.

Gelatin's performances participate in the legacy of Viennese Actionism, though they lack the movement's politics, masochism, and real blood, and owe a debt to Martin Kippenberger's self-deprecation and Paul McCarthy's abject expressions. Unease, disorientation, and danger always color Gelatin's installations, which tend to provoke fears of everything from public humiliation to suffocation and falling. Perilousness was taken to an extreme

during the collaborative's residency in the World Trade Center studio program a year ago, for which they constructed *The B-Thing*, a cantilevered balcony that extended out an open window on the ninety-first floor; all images and references to that project were removed from this exhibition. Hinting at such past provocations, the press release for this latest show read, "Gelatin is getting it all wrong again." But in fact, they got it all right.

—Meghan Dailey